

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6471

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 VIENTIANE 1194

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT LA

SUBJECT: THE STATE STRUCTURE OF THE LPDR

REF VIENTIANE 1156 (170100Z MAY 76)

SUMMARY: THIS TELEGRAM, INTENDED AS A COMPANION-PIECE TO VIENTIANE 1156 ON THE LAO PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY, PORTRAYS THE STATE STRUCTURE OF THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC AS THAT STRUCTURE APPEARS SIX MONTHS AFTER ITS ESTABLISHMENT. THE ENTITIES DISCUSSED ARE THE CHIEF OF STATE; THE QUASI-LEGISLATURE KNOWN AS THE SUPREME PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY; THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS IMMEDIATE OFFICE; THE MINISTRIES AND OTHER CABINET-LEVEL ENTITIES; AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATION AT THE LEVEL OF PROVINCE AND BELOW.

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OUR DISCUSSION IS NECESSARILY IMPRESSIONISTIC, NOT SO

MUCH BECAUSE OF THE STATE OF U.S.-LAO RELATIONS AND OUR INABILITY TO TRAVEL BUT BECAUSE MUCH OF THE STATE STRUCTURE REMAINS OBSCURE--AT LEAST TO OTHER NON-COMMUNIST EMBASSIES AND, WE BELIEVE, TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC AS WELL. THE GENERAL PICTURE THAT EMERGES IS OF AN APPARATUS STILL IN THE EARLY STAGES OF ORGANIZATION, HAMPERED BY A LACK OF EXPERIENCED CADRES, FREQUENTLY AT CROSS PURPOSES, AND DISTRACTED BY BASIC PROBLEMS OF SECURITY AND POPULATION-CONTROL THAT HAVE YET TO BE COMPLETELY MASTERED. END SUMMARY.

1. ON DECEMBER 2, 1975 THE LAO PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (LPRP) COMPLETED ITS TAKEOVER OF POWER IN LAOS BY BOLISHING THE KINGDOM OF LAOS AND ESTABLISHING THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (LPDR). IN DOING SO IT NOT ONLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE NUMBER OF MISLABELED NATIONS IN THE WORLD BUT ALSO CREATED A NEW STATE STRUCTURE FOR LAOS THROUGH WHICH THE LPRP WILL EXERCISE ITS POWER.

2. THIS NEW STRUCTURE CONTAINS A SYMBOLIC CHIEF OF STATE, A QUASI-LEGISLATURE AND AN EXECUTIVE STRUCTURE UNDER A PRIME MINISTER.

3. CHIEF OF STATE: SOUPHANOUVONG IS THE TITULAR CHIEF OF STATE AS PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC. HE IS FREQUENTLY MENTIONED IN THE PRESS PERFORMING THOSE SYMBOLIC ACTS NORMALLY ASSOCIATED WITH CHIEFS OF STATE IN A PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM. HOWEVER, HIS STATUS AS A MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO (VIENTIANE 1005, DTG 260848Z APR 76) MAY INDICATE THAT HE HAS A SUBSTANTIVE ROLE WITHIN THE LPRP. THERE IS NO VICE PRESIDENT.

4. LEGISLATURE: AT THE SAME TIME THE LPDR WAS ESTABLISHED, A QUASI-LEGISLATURE CALLED THE SUPREME PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY (SPA) WAS KCFHAP UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF PRESIDENT SOUPHANOUVONG. HOWEVER, HIS POSITION AS PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC AND CHAIRMAN OF THE SPA ARE SEPARATE FUNCTIONS AND IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IN THE FUTURE THEY MAY BE FILLED BY TWO DIFFERENT PEOPLE. CONFIDENTIAL

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THE SPA HAS FOUR VICE CHAIRMEN, ONE OF WHOM, SISOMPHONE LOVANSAY, IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THE LPRP POLITBURO. IT HAS MET INFREQUENTLY SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT AND APPEARS TO HAVE THE TASK OF DRAFTING A CONSTITUTION AND ADOPTING AN ELECTION LAW. THE LPRP APPEARS TO BE IN NO HURRY FOR IT TO ACCOMPLISH EITHER.

5. THE EXECUTIVE: PRIME MINISTER KAYSONE PHOMVIHANE,

WHO IS ALSO LPRP SECRETARY GENERAL, HEADS A CABINET MADE UP OF FOUR DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS (ALL LPRP POLITBURO MEMBERS) TWELVE OTHER MINISTERS AND SEVENTEEN SECRETARIES OF STATE (VICE-MINISTERS). THE CHAIRMEN OF THE NATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE AND THE NATIONALITIES COMMITTEE, AS WELL AS THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL BANK, ALSO ENJOY CABINET RANK. THE CABINET MEETS MONTHLY. COMMUNIQUE RELEASED AFTER THESE MEETINGS REVEAL LITTLE OF WHAT WORK IS ACCOMPLISHED DURING THEM. ITS MAIN FUNCTION AS A CORPORATE BODY SEEMS TO BE TO ENDORSE DECISIONS ALREADY MADE BY THE PARTY POLITBURO OR CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

6. PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE: FOUR OF THE TWELVE MINISTERS IN THE CABINET ARE ASSIGNED, WITHOUT PUBLICITY ANNOUNCED PORTFOLIO, TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, AS IS ONE SECRETARY OF STATE. THEY PRESUMABLY PERFORM VARIOUS COORDINATING CHORES FOR PRIME MINISTER KAYSONE. TWO OF THESE MINISTERS, AND PROBABLY ALL FOUR, ARE MEMBERS OF THE LPRP CENTRAL COMMITTEE. ON, CKGENERAL) SISAVATH KEOBOUNEPHANH, IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MILITARY AFFAIRS, WHICH IS LOGICAL IN THAT HE IS ALSO DEPUTY COMMANDER AND CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE LAO PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY (LPLA). FOR SUCH A SMALL GOVERNMENT THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE APPEARS HEAVILY STAFFED, REFLECTING KAYSONE'S KEY ROLE IN LAOS AS HEAD OF THE PARTY AND HEAD OF GOVERNMENT.

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7. ECONOMY: POLITBURO MEMBER NOUHAK PHOUMSAVANH, WHO HOLDS THE GOVERNMENT POSITIONS OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FINANCE, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME THE PRESIDENCY OF THE LAO TRADE UNION FEDERATION, APPEARS TO BE THE ECONOMIC CZAR OF THE COUNTRY. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO FIRM EVIDENCE, WE BELIEVE NOUHAK ALSO SUPERVISES THE WORK OF THE THREE OTHER MINISTRIES OPERATING IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD: 1) COMMUNICATIONS, PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION; 2) AGRICULTURE, FORESTS AND WATER WORKS; AND 3) INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE. HE MAY ALSO OVERSEE THE NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION AND THE NATIONAL BANK. THUS FAR, HOWEVER, THE ECONOMIC SECTOR HAS BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY LACK OF PLANNING AND LACK OF COORDINATION. LAO COMMUNIST OFFICIALS, WHO NOW HOLD MOST OF THE TOP POSITIONS, CONFIDENTIAL

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APPEAR IGNORANT OF AND UNINTERESTED IN ECONOMIC QUESTIONS AND THEIR REMAINING NON-COMMUNIST COLLEAGUES ARE NATURALLY HESITANT TO MAKE DECISIONS OR TO TAKE INITIATIVES. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT, DESPITE THE LPDR'S ANNOUNCED EMPHASIS ON INCREASING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, THE AGRICULTURE MINISTER IS THE ONLY MINISTER WITH PORTFOLIO WHO HAS NO SECRETARY OF STATE TO ASSIST HIM.

8. SOCIAL SERVICES: DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF EDUCATION, SPORTS AND RELIGION PHOUMI VONGVICHIT, WHO IS ALSO AN LPRP POLITBURO MEMBER, APPEARS TO BE THE HIGHEST OFFICIAL IN THE SOCIAL-SERVICES AREA OF THE LAO GOVERNMENT. HE MAY ALSO SUPERVISE--ALTHOUGH HERE AGAIN WE CAN OFFER NO CONFIRMATION--THE ACTIVITIES OF THE MINISTRIES OF INFORMATION, PROPAGANDA, CULTURE AND TOURISM; PUBLIC HEALTH; AND POSTS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS.

9. SECURITY: THE HIGHEST OFFICIAL IN THE SECURITY AREA IS THE MULTI-TITLED (GENERAL) KHAMTAY

SIPHANDONE. HE IS A MEMBER OF THE LPRP POLITBURO, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, MINISTER OF DEFENSE, AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE LPLA. KHAMTAY, WHO IS ASSISTED AS DEFENSE MINISTER BY THREE SECRETARIES OF STATE, PROBABLY ALSO SUPERVISES THE MINISTRIES OF JUSTICE AND OF INTERIOR, VETERANS AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS. SOMSUNE KHAMPHITHOUNE, THE INTERIOR MINISTER, WHO WE ASSUME MUST BE AN IMPORTANT FIGURE IN THE REGIME, HAS BEEN SUBJECT TO LITTLE PUBLIC MENTION SINCE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LPDR. WE DO NOT KNOW HIS PARTY POSITION. HE HAS EVADED COURTESY CALLS BY NON-COMMUNIST MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS.

10. THE PLACE OF THE LPLA WITHIN THE LPDR STRUCTURE IS OBVIOUSLY VERY IMPORTANT. ITS BAGGY SUITED NON-WARRIORS ARE THE MUSCLE OF THE PARTY AND IN MANY CASES ITS ONLY AGENTS FOR BRINGING ABOUT THE CHANGES THE PARTY WANTS MADE IN LAO SOCIETY. JURIDICALLY IT IS AN ARM OF THE PARTY RATHER THAN OF THE STATE. IN SUPPORT OF THE LPLA LURKS THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE'S ARMY TO DO ANY SERIOUS FIGHTING AND TO ASSIST THE LPLA IN CONFIDENTIAL

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SUPPRESSING ANY ANTI-GOVERNMENT GROUPS.

11. FOREIGN AFFAIRS: PARTY POLITBURO MEMBER PHOUNE SIPRASEUTH, AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER, HEADS LAOS' MODEST FOREIGN AFFAIRS ESTABLISHMENT. HOWEVER, IN ITS ROLE AS SOLICITOR AND COORDINATOR OF THE AID LAOS RECEIVES FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES, HIS MINISTRY PERFORMS (NOT VERY EFFICIENTLY TO DATE) A VITAL FUNCTION WITHIN THE LPDR GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE.

12. TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION: THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNION IN OCTOBER 1975, PRESUMABLY AT THE BEHEST OF THE LPRP, RE-CONFIGURED THE TERRITORIAL DIVISIONS OF LAOS. IT CREATED A STRUCTURE, WHICH PRESUMABLY CONTINUE TO EXIST, OF THIRTEEN PROVINCES AND ONE PREFECTURE (VIENTIANE). THE PROVINCES ARE: 1) PHONG SALY, 2) LUANG NAM-THA, 3) HOUA PHAN, 4) SAYABOURY, 5) OUDOMSAI, 6) LUANG PRABANG, 7) XIENG KHOUENG, 8) VIENTIANE, 9) KHAMMOUANE, 10) SAVANNAKHET, 11) SARAVANE, 12) CHAMPASSAK, AND 13) ATTAPEU. WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE THESE FOURTEEN ENTITIES APPEAR TO ENJOY CONSIDERABLE AUTONOMY. ECONOMIC AND SECURITY REGULATIONS VARY CONSIDERABLY FROM ONE JURISDICTION TO ANOTHER AND ALSO WITHIN PROVINCES, WHERE INDIVIDUAL DISTRICTS, CANTONS AND VILLAGES APPLY WHAT APPEAR TO BE BAGUELY WORDED ORDERS TO THEIR SPECIFIC SITUATIONS. THIS DEGREE OF LOCAL

AUTONOMY MAY, HOWEVER, REFLECT THE THINNESS OF THE PARTY'S TRAINED MANPOWER AND ITS INABILITY TO COORDINATE ITS POLICIES RATHER THAN A REAL DESIRE TO CREATE A DECENTRALISED STATE.

13. THE PROVINCES AND THEIR SUB-DIVISIONS ARE ADMINISTERED BY ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEES WHICH ARE "SELECTED" BY "ELECTED" PEOPLE'S COUNCILS. THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE IS THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE FOR ITS JURISDICTION. OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE HAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR VARIOUS AREAS: SECURITY, INDUSTRY, ECONOMY, AGRICULTURE, ETC. THE COUNCILS MEET INFREQUENTLY AND THEN ONLY TO RUBBER-STAMP THE ACTIONS OF THE COMMITTEE. AT EACH LEVEL, AS IS NORMAL IN A
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COMMUNIST SYSTEM, THE COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MUST ACT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE INSTRUCTIONS OF THE NEXT HIGHER LEVEL.

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14. FAMILIES: PREVIOUS REGIMES IN LAOS WERE CHARACTERIZED BY THE IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS FAMILIES AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS. NOW THE SANANIKONES, N CHAMPASSAKS, ABHAYS, INSISIENGMAYS, ETC. ARE GONE OR REMOVED FROM POSITIONS OF POWER. HOWEVER, THE COMMUNISTS TOO SOMETIMES APPEAR TO REPOSE GREATER TRUST IN THEIR BLOOD RELATIVES THAN IN OTHER COMRADES, AND THE NEW GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE IS SPRINKLED WITH BOUPHAS, CHOUNLAMANY, PHOLSENAS, AND VONGVICHITS. THE SOUVANNAVONGS ARE NOT THE POWERS THEY WERE PREVIOUSLY, BUT WITH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FINANCE BOUTSABONG SOUVANNAVONG THEY HAVE AT LEAST ONE REPRESENTATIVE IN THE NEW ORDER.

15. COMMISSIONS: THE TWO CABINET-LEVEL COMMISSIONS,
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NATIONAL PLANNING AND NATIONALITIES, HAVE BEEN LITTLE MENTIONED SINCE THE LPDR'S ESTABLISHMENT. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FORMER DO APPEAR AT AID-RECEIVING CEREMONIES FROM TIME TO TIME, BUT NO MENTION HAS BEEN MADE OF ANY ACTION BY THE COMMISSION AS A WHOLE. (NON-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES WITH AID PROGRAMS IN LAOS, AND PERHAPS SOCIALIST DONOR-COUNTRIES AS WELL, DEAL PRIMARILY WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND SOMETIMES WITH OTHER MINISTRIES IN ADDITION.) THENATIONALITIES COMMISSION, WHICH IS PRESUMABLY INTENDED TO COORDINATE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE VARIOUS MOUNTAIN TRIBES, HAS PROBABLY NOT IN FACT BEEN CREATED. INTERESTED PERSONS WISHING TO CONTACT IT IN VIENTIANE HAVE MET WITH NO SUCCESS.

16. COMMENT: READERS WILL HAVE NOTICED MANY QUALIFIERS IN THE ABOVE DESCRIPTION OF THE LAO GOVERNMENT. THESE ARE NECESSARY BECAUSE THE LAO HAVE SAID VERY LITTLE ABOUT HOW THEIR GOVERNMENT WORKS OR WHERE RESPONSIBILITY FOR VARIOUS ACTIVITIES RESTS WITHIN IT. IN MANY CASES THEY MAY NOT KNOW THEMSELVES. EACH MINISTRY AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATION APPEARS TO OPERATE WITH CONSIDERABLE INDEPENDENCE AND OFTEN AT CROSS PURPOSES TO EVERY OTHER. MANY COMMUNIST STAFF-MEMBERS IN THE MINISTRIES ARE STILL LEARNING THEIR JOBS, AND PERSONNEL ARE STILL BEING

SHUFFLED AROUND. THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE, FOR EXAMPLE, NOW REPORTEDLY HAS ITS THIRD DIRECTOR OF INDUSTRY IN THE SIX MONTHS OF ITS EXISTENCE, AND THERE IS A STIR IN WHAT REMAINS OF THE LOCAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY THIS WEEK BECAUSE THE MINISTER -- VIRTUALLY INACCESSIBLE HERETOFORE-- HAS HELD GROUP-MEETINGS WITH VIENTIANE'S LARGEST PRIVATE EMPLOYERS.

17 SUPERFICIALLY IT MIGHT BE ASSUMED THAT ONE OF THE STRENGTHS OF COMMUNIST RULE IN LAOS OR ELSEWHERE WOULD BE THE PARTY'S ROLE AS A UNIFYING AND COORDINATING MECHANISM. THE LPRP APPEARS TO BE HAVING DIFFICULTIES FULFILLING THAT ROLE, NO DOUBT BECAUSE OF ITS OVER-RIDING CONCERN WITH THE SECURITY SITUATION AND THE EXIGENCIES OF ITS EFFORTS AT POPULATION CONTROL WHICH ABSORB MOST OF ITS FEW TRAINED CADRES.
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